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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002721

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SUBJECT: MFA ON SARKOZY-MEDVEDEV PLAN; DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH
SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

REF: MOSCOW 2484

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells: Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

1. (C) Summary: In a September 10 meeting, MFA Director Kelin said the September 8 Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement clearly limited new deployments of OSCE and EU monitors to Georgia proper, with Lavrov dismissing the Sarkozy-Barosso letter as an "unscrupulous attempt" to do Saakashvili's bidding. Russia is satisfied with the EU as the "guarantor" of Georgia's no use of force pledge, even as EU Commission officials here suggest there is unease among some members over the undertaking. Having rejected French efforts to put the status of the territories on the international conference agenda, Russia evinced little interest in its modalities, but was adamant on separatist leadership participation at the UN. Kelin amplified the September 9 announcement of formal diplomatic ties, a cooperation treaty, and trilateral defense arrangement, noting that Russia would assume responsibility for the defense of the two territories through the stationing of two "reinforced brigades." While arms transfers were not under consideration, Kelin acknowledged plans to train and build the capacity of defense and border forces. Kelin had nothing new on the whereabouts of U.S. HMMWVs and rejected concerns over the obstruction of aid, insisting that prior approval from Moscow or Tskhinvali was required. Calling Georgia's breaking of diplomatic relations a mistake, Kelin dismissed charges that Russian troops movements through Roki tunnel precipitated the August 7 Georgian attack. End Summary

International monitors

2. (C) In a September 10 meeting, MFA 4th CIS Director Andrey Kelin said there was no ambiguity over the question of access for new OSCE and EU monitors to South Ossetia and Abkhazia: there would be none. Kelin insisted that the September 8 discussions between Medvedev and Sarkozy on this point had been "crystal clear." Under the agreement, which Medvedev read in its entirety at the September 8 press conference, pre-existing OSCE and UN observers would remain in place "in accordance with their number and deployment" as of August 7. This translated into 140 UN observers in three posts in Abkhazia (Sukhumi, Gali, and Zugdidi) and eight OSCE observers in Tskhinvali. The 20 new OSCE observers already deployed, together with the expected addition of 80 OSCE and 200 EU observers, would operate only in the territory contiguous to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The exact boundaries of the "security zone" were subject to further discussion, Kelin maintained, since the 1994 agreement did not provide a buffer in northern Abkhazia or in the eastern zone of South Ossetia, putting both the Upper Kodori and the Roki tunnel in shooting distance of Georgia. In response to our rejection of security zones, Kelin replied that Russia would seek to "put something there," in accordance with the international peacekeeping mechanism.

13. (SBU) Kelin's comments mirrored Lavrov's September 9 remarks that the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement "should erase any questions about where OSCE monitors would be deployed. They will be deployed along South Ossetia, in order to help prevent the renewed use of force by Tbilisi." Lavrov spoke even more bluntly about reports of a letter signed by Sarkozy and EC President Barroso in Tbilisi on September 8 stipulating that EU monitors would also be deployed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, stressing that it carried no weight with Russia. "First, this is not true. Second, this is an absolutely unscrupulous attempt to do Mr. Saakashvili's bidding instead of honestly explaining to Mr. Saakashvili what obligations the European Union has undertaken and what obligations Russia has undertaken," Lavrov said. He added, "We would like our EU partners to watch out, and I hope they understand who they are dealing with and understand that they might be deceived. We all know very well that provocations, including military ones, are a kind of trademark of the current Georgian regime's policy."

14. (C) EU Commission officials here told us that the Sarkozy-Barroso letter was provided in Tbilisi in order to address the fact that respect for Georgian territorial integrity was not in the text of the September 8 agreement. The letter, we were told, stated that the EU "stands ready" to deploy monitors to the whole of Georgian territory. Officials said they did not expect EU monitors to obtain access to the conflict territories.

15. (C) When pressed on the need for additional monitors inside the disputed territories, in light of the potential for ethnic violence (and with specific reference to the

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September 10 shooting of a Georgian policeman at the Karaleti checkpoint), Kelin responded that Russia was the guarantor of security in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He maintained that the ethnic flashpoint was limited to a geographically small area around Ahmadini near Akhalkori, where Georgian police remained in control. Kelin asserted that about 4,200 UNHCR-registered ethnic Georgian refugees had fled the area, but would be allowed to return once the situation became calmer.

No use of force pledge

16. (C) Kelin said that Russia was satisfied that the two Saakashvili letters, coupled with the letter signed by EU Solana and EC Barroso on behalf of EU President Sarkozy guaranteeing Saakashvili's pledge, constituted a legally binding no use of force. Echoing Lavrov, Kelin said Russia considered the EU to be the "guarantor" of the no use of force pledge. While South Ossetia and Abkhazia wanted a "stronger" pledge from Georgia -- one that was signed by Sukhumi, Tskhinvali, and Tbilisi as equals -- Kelin said that Russia had made no decision whether to advance this claim. The EU Commission tells us that privately some members have expressed serious reservations with the EU serving as a "guarantor," with one quipping that the most the EU had ever guaranteed was the "safety and quality of EU meat."

No Clarity, Little Interest in International Conference

17. (C) Kelin described the October 15 conference as a French demand, which Russia saw no need for since the future for South Ossetia and Abkhazia had already been resolved "at least to the satisfaction of Russia and Nicaragua." Kelin noted that Russia had rejected French language proposing a discussion on the territories' future status, limiting the conference's agenda to discussions of the security and stability of the region, along with the status of refugees and internally displaced. Kelin had to light to shed on

format or aegis.

UNOMIG

¶8. (C) Noting the September 8 consultations of UN Special Representative Verbeke on UNOMIG, Kelin said Russia would insist on the presence of the separatist leadership, before contemplating a technical rollover when the October 15 mandate expired. Kelin said that an Arria format would not be sufficient to redress Russian concerns, since it only allowed South Ossetia and Abkhazia to provide informal views.

If the U.S. would not provide the necessary visas for the leaders to attend UN meetings in New York, another venue such as Geneva or Paris would be possible.

Diplomatic and Military Relations

¶9. (C) Kelin did not have much to add to Lavrov's September 9 press conference with "Foreign Ministers" Shamba and Dzhoev, announcing the formal establishment of diplomatic ties at the level of embassies, the initialing of a treaty on mutual cooperation and assistance, the establishment of trilateral defense relations, and the announcement of further work on border, economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, and customs union agreements. Amplifying on Defense Minister Serdyukov's September 9 report to Medvedev, Kelin noted that a "reinforced brigade," numbering 3,500-3,800, would be deployed in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. While Lavrov specified the right to "construct, use, and modernize the military infrastructure and bases" on the territories, Kelin denied that talks were underway on arms transfers to South Ossetia or Abkhazia, reiterating that Russia had taken responsibility for the security of both into its own hands. When pushed, Kelin acknowledged that Russia would assist in training local forces and border guards, including in training centers on Russian soil, "like the U.S. does with NATO partners."

¶10. (C) Kelin rejected charges that the military relationship constituted a violation of its commitments to Sarkozy or that military training was destabilizing, particularly in light of Kokoity's history of provocative attacks. Shrugging off warnings that Russian preemptive actions would shape the West's response, Kelin replied "if

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you want to lose more arms, transfer them to Saakashvili." Lavrov used his two press conferences on September 9 to underscore the danger of rearming an aggressive Saakashvili, with Russian media spinning the introduction of a UNSC resolution banning exports of weapons to Georgia as a necessary Russian signal to the international community -- even as the press acknowledged it had no chance of passage.

¶11. (C) A particularly fawning South Ossetian FM Dzhoev underscored the centrality of Russia to the conflict territories, stating at the joint September 9 press conference with Lavrov that "the road to the West for the people of South Ossetia always goes through Russia" (with Lavrov interjecting that all roads to the East did as well) and that "in contrast to our neighbors (Georgia), for us the sun astronomically always rises from the same direction."

Return of U.S. Military Equipment

¶12. (C) Kelin had no response on the previously delivered reftel demarche for Russia to return U.S. HMMWVs and other military equipment seized in Poti. Without contesting our description of Russian forces seizing the equipment from the Poti port facility, Kelin urged that the same message be

passed in military channels, which we noted had already been done.

Humanitarian assistance

¶13. (C) In response to our strong concern over the Russian obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian assistance, Kelin denied that real problems existed, noting that all aid coming from North Ossetia was proceeding apace. For those wanting to bring in assistance from Georgia proper, it had to be done in the "appropriate" way, which he said was by asking Tskhinvali or Moscow for permission. Kelin said that Russian peacekeepers were not empowered to permit the passage of humanitarian aid absent its prior notification: "you cannot negotiate this with General Kulakhmetov." We underscored Russia's obligation under the August 12 agreement to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all of Georgia and took issue with statements by President Medvedev that U.S. humanitarian assistance served as a cover for military supplies. In response, Kelin invited the U.S. to provide specific lists of the aid provided to Georgia, particularly via naval assets. While the MFA understood that military ships were a standard means of delivering humanitarian aid, "others do not."

Russia-Georgia relations

¶14. (C) Kelin said that the GOR had not yet responded to Georgia's decision to sever diplomatic ties with Russia, but confirmed the bulk of Russian non-citizen services had been shut down in Tbilisi, and that the Russian Ambassador would depart Tbilisi soon unless some other solution was found. Kelin described breaking relations as "not the wisest step" for Georgia to take, as it damaged Georgia more than Russia. Kelin said most Russians traveling to Georgia were ethnic Georgians, while about one million Georgians were living and working in Russia on Russian visas. Many of those were now asking for Russian passports, Kelin noted, and he added Russia "would be flexible" in responding to those demands. Kelin bridled at press comments by Saakashvili that Georgian had proof that Russian forces moving through Roki tunnel triggered the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali on August 7. Kelin reiterated that Russia had established a timeline that showed a 24-hour gap between the beginning of hostilities and Russian tanks entering Roki tunnel.

BEYRLE